

News Release From
Senator Tim Johnson,
Senator John Thune,
Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin
Friday, May 28, 2010

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Julianne Fisher, 202-224-1638
Andi Fouberg, 202-228-5381
Betsy Hart, 202-226-8555

South Dakota Delegation Calls on Ag Secretary to Help Prevent Grasshopper Infestation

WASHINGTON, DC (May 28, 2010) – U.S. Senators Tim Johnson (D-SD) and John Thune (R-SD) and U.S. Representative Stephanie Herseth Sandlin (D-SD) today sent a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack requesting additional assistance to respond to a possible grasshopper infestation this summer in South Dakota.

“Anyone who drove through western South Dakota last summer certainly understands the severity of a grasshopper infestation and the detrimental effects grasshoppers can have on our rangelands,” Johnson said. “Surveys conducted last fall indicate the potential for even heavier infestations this summer. Our agricultural producers have already suffered many weather-related hardships over the past year and it is imperative that they have the tools and resources necessary to combat the impending infestation over the coming weeks and months.”

“There are indications that the grasshopper infestation this summer could be particularly harmful to farmers and ranchers in South Dakota,” said Thune. “USDA needs to be prepared in the event that grasshoppers cause significant economic harm to producers across our state.”

“Grasshopper infestation could threaten the livelihood of producers in our state’s agricultural economy,” Rep. Herseth Sandlin said. “South Dakota is predicted to experience one of the heaviest outbreaks in the country, so it’s important that we take steps now should the

grasshopper infestation prove as damaging as has been forecasted.”

The letter to Vilsack follows:

May 28, 2010

Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We write with great concern for the potential grasshopper infestation this summer. South Dakota, as well as many other western states, faces a potential infestation that could devastate the farming and ranching industry in the affected areas. Surveys conducted by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) last fall indicate the potential for heavy infestations. Though we realize there are many factors that will contribute to the size of the grasshopper population in any given year and that the impending spring survey will provide a better estimate of the severity of the infestation, we write to request details of the steps that will be taken in the event that the survey indicates the grasshopper infestation will be severe and what resources you have available for suppression efforts.

We understand that the USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) intends to begin a survey of the conditions in South Dakota in May and to subsequently develop an action plan for treating and suppressing the infestation if warranted. We thank you for proactively addressing the impending situation; however, given predictions that this summer’s infestation could be worse and more widespread than the summer of 2009, we request a description of the timeline and steps that will be taken in addressing the conditions. We also understand that APHIS believes it has the resources necessary for both survey and suppression efforts and that if necessary, funding may be shifted from other sources. We would like detailed information as to the sources of the funds that will be used, particularly for suppression efforts.

Producers throughout South Dakota and other western states experienced significant economic losses resulting from the damage caused by last year’s grasshopper infestation. While we appreciate the survey process that must be undertaken, we would like assurances that the Department will be prepared for whatever conditions arise this year.

Thank you for your timely consideration of our request.

Sincerely,

Tim Johnson
U.S. Senate

John Thune
U.S. Senate

Stephanie Herseth Sandlin
Member of

Congress